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ABSTRACT

This study examined strategies that could assist public school administrators and school boards with the passage of bond issues. It specifically looked at such issues as the time of year that an issue was presented to voters, the nexus between community relations and successful passage, and leadership structure of bond campaigns. A survey instrument was developed and sent to 100 school districts in Missouri that had sought a bond issue. The results revealed little correlation between the researched aspects and success; while most superintendents readily indicate that they have a successful technique, the process may in fact involve only luck. The study calls for additional research. (EV)

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Perceptions of Successful Strategies and Passage of School Bond Issues

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Abstract

Perceptions of Successful Strategies and Passage of School Bond Issues

Modern educational facilities that provide students with the best environment for learning should be a priority in .America. Much is being discussed across the ration regarding the crumbling of school buildings in general, and the perplexities of how to correct the situation. The necessity of paying for facilities falls on the backs of the taxpayer who is reluctant to accommodate increasing his or her tax burden. This often leads to conflict between the taxpayer and the public schools' mandate to provide high quality educational facilities. Consequently administration and school boards must seek winning bond strategies without alienating their constituents.

This study was conducted to research what strategies existed that would assist public school administrators and school boards with the passage of bond issues. It specifically looked at such issues as the time of year that an issue was preserved to voters. Other issues such as the nexus between community relations and successful passage were also considered. Leadership structure of bond campaigns and its implications were also a part of the study

A survey instrument was developed and sent to one hundred out of one hundred eighty school districts m Missouri that had sought aboard issue A Pearson r was used for statistical purposes to analyze the relationship between each of the research questions using the significance level of .005 to indicate sufficient relationship.

Little correlation occurred in the study, raising a number of questions about how to assist school districts in the successful passage of a bond issue. Most superintendents will readily indicate that they have a successful technique when m fact the whole process may be an act of pure luck. It is obvious from this study that additional research must be conducted to identify those successful strategies.

Perceptions of Successful Strategies and Passage of School Bond Issues

Modern educational facilities that provide students with the best environment for learning should be a priority in America. Each student should have the opportunity to obtain an education from facilities that stimulate growth for the future. Throughout the United States, the predominant way to improve facilities is to pass bond issues that require citizens to bear the burden through increased property taxes. Increasing populations, deteriorating older structures and modern technology have created in many schools an immediate need for new facilities. Because of this critical issue schools must find ways to encourage voters to support bond issues through tax levy increases.

The importance of this study is to inform researchers and other interested educators of the most successful methods used to pass bond issues. Many school districts are in need of a successful plan of action to submit to school boards, students, parents and community members. " For many school districts already struggling to pay for essential budget items, such repair and building costs cannot come out of the usual tax revenues, and in many cases opposition to such projects is too great to overcome" (Boschee & Holt, 1999,p.12).

The purpose of this study is to assess the relationship of strategies used by schools and their success with bond issues. The following research questions were posed in this study:

1. Is there a positive relationship between strategies used and a school bond's success?
2. Is there a positive relationship between the time of year a bond issue is placed on a ballot and its success"
3. Is there a positive relationship between community relations and a school bond's success?

4. Are there common negative factors associated with a school bond's failure'
5. Is there a positive relationship between die leadership structure of a bond campaign and its success

Two critical components in most school districts involve the senior citizen and parental vote. As the age of the average vote continues to climb the school district must find selling points to the population of the community Framer (2001) noted: Older voters gel out to the polls and vole self interest. They vote more often than younger citizens and education isn't at the top of their priority list. Will the growing elderly population pass school budgets and bond issues? The challenge of school districts is how to get this segment of the population active in the schools so that they see the needs of the future.

A strategy developed by the superintendent of Lake Washington Schools to get senior citizen interest in the schools' activities. Scarf (1995) suggested that senior voters' lack of support comes from not having school age children. Offering them passes good for free admission to all sports events, plays and other school activities allows them to become involved. Keeping the older community involved and enthusiastic helps prevent levies from being voted down.

Carter (1995) considers parents as the focus of bond issues. Parents should be the target of bond issues because their children have the most to gain from its passage. Teachers should get the word out through flyers with the children. They must see what is at stake if the bond fails and how a vote against the proposal will be a vote against the future of their children. Parents need to see what benefits their children will receive so they will be getting the most return from their tax dollars. If the parents are not convinced the bond will benefit their children, they will not support the bond.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument was divided into eight sections. The first section sought information from superintendents about being a part of bond issues, reasons why bond issues failed and what was the optimal tine for preparation for a bond issue. The next section was devoted to the planning stages of bond issues. The third section sought answers to the use of community meetings used m bond issues. The fourth section was devoted to the use of the newspaper and radio. Section rive was devoted to campaign strategies. Questions about the campaign structure were asked about in the next section and the last section was devoted to community relations.

Administration Procedures

Superintendents in the study were selected based cm their years in administration and from knowledge obtained on recent bond issues having been proposed m their school districts. Front a total of 180 high schools, 100 were randomly chosen to participate m the survey

Analysis of the Data

The Pearson r was used for statistical purposes to analyze the relationship between each of the research questions and the passage of a bond issue. A relationship of 1.00 would be considered a perfect correlation. A significance factor at the 005 level was determined to indicate a sufficient relationship between variables. The variable of "Percentage of Yes Votes" and six sub-divisions of questions were analyzed. None of the variables had a sufficient relationship to meet the criteria of significance as the 005 level

From this information the researcher selected the top five strategies as viewed by the superintendents surveyed. The percentage of times the strategy was viewed as "very good or good" was the criteria for the selection of the top five strategies

The strategy to "provide senior citizens with free admission to activities" was viewed by the superintendents surveyed as a popular technique on a five-point Likert scale 4.07 indicated that superintendents perceived this technique would help pass a bond issue. This technique had a response of fifty seven percent in the "good, very good" categories.

The "use of senior citizens in schools" had an average response of 4 13 on a five point Likert scale. Sixty seven percent of the respondents felt this was a "very good" at "good" strategy.

The superintendents surveyed responded that the "use of the newspaper to report school needs" was effective The response was 4.24 on a five-point Likert scale with respondents selecting "very good" or "good" seventy three per cent of the time.

Allowing "community use of facilities" was the second most popular technique wish a score of 4.33 on a five-point Likert scale. Sixty Seven percent viewed this strategy as "very good" or "good"

The respondents selected "using influential community members" as the most effective strategy in passing bond issues. Their score on a five-point Liken scale was J 62 with eighty five percent of those surveyed indicating that this technique was "very good" or "good"

Recommendations

This study did not produce significant correlation between the strategies used and the passage of bad issues. The ability of school districts to determine what significant factors affect the

outcome of a bond is difficult to understand. There are many confounding factors that are difficult to distinguish when determining voter out-comes. Districts contemplating a hand issue should engage in data gathering through surveys and meetings prior to any bond issue.

1. Is there a positive relationship between strategies used and a school bond's success?
2. The use of paid consultants to provide resources, plan a campaign, and foster at understanding of the district demographics should be considered.
3. Make every effort to involve senior citizens in the public schools through programs of volunteerism, free admittance to activities, and service on school committees
4. Seek out those community members who display leadership abilities and keep them involved in the schools.
5. Sub-divide the responsibilities of the campaigning into manageable units.

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